

TRI-UMPHANT GEORGIA'S PERFORMANCE HAS EVERYONE TALKING

IT'S NOT every day you can claim to toe the line with an Olympic medallist but on the occasion of the Start Fitness Northern Athletics Cross-Country Relay Championships in Sheffield's Graves Park that was certainly the case.

After the conclusion of the junior contests it was the turn of the senior women's three stage two-mile contest which saw around 50 teams on the start line including Sale Harriers Manchester's Tokyo Olympic medallist Georgia Taylor-Brown who would be donning her cross-country shoes for the first time since she finished runner-up in the Northern Championships in Bedale way back in January, 2020.

It may have been a strange sight to many of the spectators watching the proceedings on a bitterly cold day in South Yorkshire seeing the super tri-athlete scorching round the firm terrain on the first leg in her Sale colours after competing in her GB outfits in Japan during the summer.

Once the starter got the competitors underway, Taylor-Brown, a former National XC under-23 champion, was quickly to the fore and with every stride seemed to widen the gap over her rivals, so much so, that at the changeover (10min 58sec, a time which proved to be the fastest overall at the end of the day) she had over a minute advantage over second-placed Lincoln Wellington (Rachel Harrison, 12:00, second fastest overall) with Rotherham's Samantha Hughes a further five seconds adrift in third place.

On leg two Emma Tilley extended Sale's advantage by posting the stage's fastest and third fastest overall time of 12:19. Rotherham (Sophie Cowper) moved into second place ahead of Lincoln Wellington (Natalie Burns) with Hallamshire (Charlotte Slack) now in fourth spot.

On the final leg it was a case which club would pick up the minor awards as Sophie Wood added to Sale's advantage to make it a clean sweep of fastest stage times to bring the team home in 35:20. Nicola Devine (12:04) consolidated Rotherham's second place as their B team, who were 14th after leg one, moved ahead of Lincoln Wellington only for the Lincoln trio to receive the bronze award with the Rotherham second string – Natasha Hatswell their quickest with 12:14 – picking up the B team awards.

While many clubs don't seem to have the relays as a priority, a special thanks goes out to the Steel City Striders outfit who managed to close-in a remarkable five teams. Well done.

SENIOR MEN

THE Senior Men's 4x2-mile event brought the programme to a close and while Sale led throughout in the women's contest that certainly wasn't the case for the men as three different clubs led at one time or another.

City of York led at the first changeover thanks to the fastest time of the day of 9:50 by Angus Mcmillan – he posted 10:42 in 2019 – Trafford (Finlay Proffitt, 9:57) were in second place followed by Hallamshire (Connor Milnes, 10:20), Salford, Vale Royal and Barnsley. Of the 10 fastest overall times eight were posted on the first leg.

Trafford moved into pole position at the half-way stage thanks to Cynog Williams' 10:45 as City of York (Nicholas Dickinson) dropped to second, six seconds behind. Raif Serif moved Vale Royal into a medal position for the first time with Hallamshire dropping back to fourth place ahead of City of Sheffield and Dearne with Leeds City moving up to sixth.

On the penultimate stage Hallamshire, thanks to Christopher Law's 10:32, moved into the lead for the first time and at the final changeover had a cushion of 22 seconds over City of Sheffield with Trafford relegated to third position ahead of Vale Royal, City of York and Rotherham.

Hallamshire had Cameron Bell on the glory leg and not only did he consolidate the lead with the third fastest overall time of 10:16 but added another 19 seconds to the advantage to bring the quartet home in 41:47. The medal positions stayed the same on the last leg with City of Sheffield finishing runners up (42:28) and Vale Royal (42:57) receiving the bronze awards ahead of Trafford, City of York and Rotherham.

JUNIOR ROUND-UP

THE Under-17 events – 3x2,300m opened the day's action with the women first off and it was Rotherham's Evie Thompson first back to the changeover point with the overall fastest time of the day of 8:00. Vale Royal's Hope Smith was in second place (8:16) with Blackburn's Abigail Stratton (8:18) close behind followed by Chorley Athletic and Triathlon, Holmfirth and Vale Royal.

Holly Weedall (8:14) moved Vale Royal into the lead on leg two ahead of Blackburn (Isobel Holt) with Rotherham slipping back to third ahead of Vale Royal, Holmfirth and Sale.

On the final leg Grace Roberts (8:10) consolidated Vale Royal's lead bringing the team home in 24:40, 62 seconds ahead Rotherham (Anna Maddocks) with Vale Royal's second string (Alice Gale) moving into third ahead of Blackburn with the fourth-placed team being awarded the bronze medals.

Liverpool were out on front after the first leg of the under-17 men's contest

Thanks to Liam McCay's 7:01 effort. Rotherham (Zak Ferguson) were in second place three seconds adrift with Wirral (Ethan Brady-Jones) a further five seconds back in third followed by Wirral B, Stockport and Sale.

Wirral (Tj Jones) moved into the lead on the penultimate stage with William Stanway moving Trafford through to second from sixth with Rotherham slipping back to third followed by Sale, Wirral B and Trafford B.

Trafford stormed into the lead on the final leg thanks to the fastest time of the day (6:57) by James Knockton as he brought the team home in 21:36, six seconds clear of Wirral's William Strickley with Evan Savage moving Sale into a medal position for the first time to claim the bronze awards, just two seconds ahead of Chorley Athletic and Tri Club.

The three-stage under-15 events were over a distance of 2,000m and it was Stockport's Freya Murdoch, with the overall fastest time of the day of 7:23, who hit the first changeover ahead of her rivals by just one second. City of York (Lottie Langan) were in second place with Rotherham (Caitlan McCloy) in third followed by Vale Royal, Salford and Sale.

Rotherham moved into pole position on leg two thanks to Lilia Harris (7:40) as City of York (Sophie Robertson-Dover) stayed second with Stockport (Gracie Hunt) slipping to third ahead of Salford, Vale Royal and Allerton.

Rotherham extended their advantage on the final leg thanks to Isabella Waugh's 7:42 effort which brought her home 90 seconds clear of City of York's Katarina Savkovik with Elena Bartalotta moving Salford into bronze medal position ahead of Stockport, Wirral and Rotherham B.

It took the overall fastest time of the day by Robert Price (6:52) on the final leg to give Vale Royal victory in the under-15 boys contest. Barnsley were in the lead at the first changeover thanks to Jonson Hughes (6:56) with Trafford (Freddie Meredith) in second place followed by Derby (Ewan Busfield) then came Liverpool, Wirral and Warrington with Vale Royal back in eighth position. Wirral (Ben Williams) moved into the lead on stage two followed by Derby (Stanley Lowe) and Trafford (Luke Carrington) then came Liverpool, Warrington and Barnsley with Vale Royal still languishing in eighth spot.

A huge turnabout came on the final leg as first into view came Vale Royal (Robert Price) who were comfortably ahead and at the line had 13 seconds in hand over second-placed Wirral (Oberon Kearney) with Trafford (Charley Stanway) a further four seconds adrift in third place. Liverpool were fourth followed by Derby and Chorley Athletic and Tri.

The under-13 3x1,800m contests were a triumph for Liverpool Harriers with both the girls and boys topping the podium while their B team finished runners-up in the girls' contest.

The yellow-vested Merseysiders were one and two throughout the girls event with victory eventually going to the B team after hitting the front on the final stage. Holly Cross and Isabella Doran had the A team in the lead after two legs but Lexie Ellis with the second fastest time of the day – her B team colleague Bailey Hughes was quickest – brought Liverpool's second string home in first place eight seconds ahead of the A team. Rotherham, with Grace Ingoe their quickest, finished in third place with Wakefield picking up the bronze awards ahead of Sale, Wirral and City of York.

Like the girls, Liverpool were never headed in the boys contest thanks to the efforts of Charlie Rigby, Max Taylor and Sonny Cassell. Trafford were second throughout the contest and Sale always third with City of York finishing fourth, Rothwell fifth. However, it was Salford's Evan Grime who, on stage two, who posted the quickest time of the day of 5:21.

The under-11 events over a distance of 1,500m, didn't come under the championship banner but, nevertheless, competition was just as keen. The girls contest went to North East club Birtley AC who led from the gun with Kitty Graham (5:23) giving them a lead of 17 seconds over another NE club, Allerton (Connie Wilford) with Salford (Emme Lowe) a close up third followed by Sale and Liverpool.

On leg two Izzy Hall extended Birtley's advantage as Sale moved into second place ahead of Allerton and Liverpool A and B teams.

The leading positions stayed the same on leg three though Nell Graham, the twin sister of Kitty, opened the gap even further by posting the best time overall of 5:16 and getting the family bragging rights. Sale finished in silver medal position with Allerton completing the one-two-three though fast-finishing Evie Worrall finished just one second down for Liverpool A in fourth place. Liverpool B finished fifth and Hallamshire sixth.

In the boys event, Warrington led throughout thanks to Euan Lawton, Issac McGuffie and Oliver Davenport, Euan posting the overall fastest time of 5:05. Hallamshire, who were lying fifth after the first stage, finished runners-up with Trafford completing the podium places holding off Salford by just three seconds.

**Thanks go from Northern Athletics to everyone who helped make the event possible.

BILL McGUIRK

